

# Building an Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Future with Indigenous Peoples: A Call To Action

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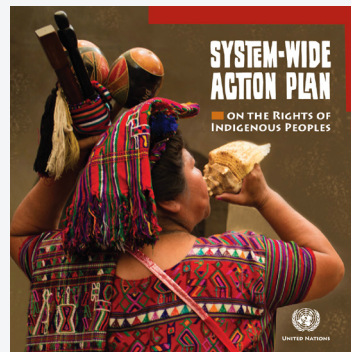


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## System-Wide Action Plan on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (SWAP)

*At the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the General Assembly requested the development of a system-wide action plan for a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

*Following months of consultation with indigenous peoples, member states and within the UN system, the Secretary-General shared a finalized system-wide action plan with heads of UN system organizations at the second regular session of 2015 of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in November 2015, where he encouraged them to make concerted efforts to implement the plan.*



*The system-wide action plan covers six action areas:*

- *Raise awareness on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and indigenous issues*
- *Support the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly at the country level*
- *Support the realization of indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*
- *Conduct a mapping exercise of existing policies, standards, guidelines, activities, resources and capacities within the UN and multilateral system to identify opportunities and gaps*
- *Develop capacities of states, indigenous peoples, civil society and UN personnel at all levels and*
- *Support the participation of indigenous peoples in processes that affect them.*

Download the System-wide action plan [here](#). Or find the United Nations Official Document (E/C.19/2016/5) with links to all UN languages here: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/C.19/2016/5](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/C.19/2016/5)

### Background:

In 2020, the fifth anniversary of the **SWAP-Indigenous Peoples**, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (**IASG**) saw the opportunity to revitalize the action plan and strengthen collective and coherent UN system efforts through a call to action on building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples. The draft call to action was discussed and approved by the High-level Committee on Programmes (**HLCP**), the principal mechanism for forging policy coherence and programme coordination on strategic policy issues facing the United Nations system, at its fortieth session in October 2020. The call to action was subsequently endorsed in November 2020 by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (**CEB**), the longest-standing and highest-level coordination forum of the United Nations system, composed of the Executive Heads of 31 United Nations system entities.



**United Nations System**  
Chief Executives Board  
for Coordination (CEB)

[unsceb.org](https://unsceb.org)

## Building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples: a call to action

1. The rights of indigenous peoples have been given progressively more attention by the United Nations system, from the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982 to the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007, as well as the outcome document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples of 2014. The system-wide action plan for ensuring a coherent approach to achieving the ends of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (E/C.19/2016/5) was developed in 2015 to provide a framework to measure the support and progress of United Nations work to advance the rights and well-being of the world's over 476 million indigenous persons.<sup>1</sup>
2. However, the implementation of these international legal instruments and United Nations frameworks has been uneven. Indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous children, youth, girls and women, elders, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, continue to face widespread discrimination and marginalization, which has been further magnified by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The fifth anniversary of the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples provides an opportunity for revitalizing the plan and strengthening collective and coherent United Nations system action. The upcoming International Decade of Indigenous Languages, which the period 2022–2032 has been proclaimed, provides an opportunity to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote them.<sup>2</sup>
3. While representing over 6.2 per cent of the world's population, indigenous peoples are nearly three times as likely to be living in extreme poverty than non-indigenous peoples. They account for almost 19 per cent of the extreme poor.<sup>3</sup> Indigenous peoples have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences<sup>4</sup> and are often at higher risk from emerging infectious diseases.
4. Furthermore, a lack of legal recognition and of disaggregated data have contributed to the invisibility of indigenous peoples and further compounded the discrimination that they face. The situation calls for reinvigorated efforts towards addressing the negative

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future* (Geneva, 2019), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See General Assembly resolution 74/135, paras. 24 and 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, "Indigenous Peoples and COVID-19: A Guidance Note for the UN System", available at [www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/covid-19.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/covid-19.html).

legacy of historical injustices, discrimination and assimilation that indigenous peoples have been subjected to over centuries.

5. Indigenous women and girls face additional forms of discrimination and vulnerability. They are three times more likely to experience sexual violence compared with non-indigenous women and are particularly affected by large-scale land-grabbing and dispossession because of their unequal access to and control over land, territories and natural resources, coupled with their limited mobility, access to justice and decision-making power in the household and the community (E/CN.6/2020/3, para. 278). The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these existing vulnerabilities.
6. Respect for indigenous peoples' rights must go hand in hand with their meaningful participation, inclusion and empowerment to make informed decisions, as full and equal members of society. Indigenous peoples are indispensable partners and contributors to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Their understanding of nature's cycles, livelihoods and indigenous food systems, as well as their holistic world view and traditional knowledge, passed down intergenerationally, contributes to the protection of biodiversity and the fight against climate change — essential elements for a successful and long-term COVID-19 recovery process. The traditional lands and territories of indigenous peoples are the most biologically diverse, and essential for a culturally and linguistically diverse planet.
7. The response of indigenous peoples to the global pandemic, and their leadership in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in their communities, has further shown their resilience in the face of adversity.
8. A sustainable COVID-19 response and recovery needs to address the realities and threats faced by indigenous peoples and must consider their inalienable rights. Indigenous peoples may face increased persecution, intimidation and harassment while governments try to rebuild their economies.
9. Response and recovery efforts also need to consider how indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women and girls, are disproportionately affected by poverty and a lack of access to social protection and how indigenous children and youth experience much higher rates of suicide and self-harm compared with non-indigenous peoples. Public policies and social protection packages designed to reactivate the economy should include indigenous peoples as beneficiaries and incorporate their perspectives and rights into devising and implementing the type of assistance needed.
10. Conflicts involving indigenous peoples over land, territories and resources have become frequent. Attacks on defenders of the human rights of indigenous peoples for defending their collective rights to lands, territories and resources, which include indigenous environmental human rights defenders, have increased dramatically in recent years. The continued conflicts and human rights violations related to their lands often also result

in the displacement and dispossession of indigenous peoples and, in some instances, a heightened risk of statelessness, particularly for those indigenous peoples whose traditional lands cross national borders.

11. Under the leadership of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, and in response to a request by the General Assembly, the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples was developed by the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, with the aim of increasing United Nations system coherence in addressing the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples in its work, including in support of Member States. The plan includes specific practical and realistic action points across six action areas. In November 2015, the action plan was brought to the attention of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), and members were encouraged to support its implementation in their respective organizations and to make concerted efforts to raise awareness of indigenous peoples' issues (CEB/2015/2, para. 58).
12. The 2020 call to action of the Secretary-General for human rights<sup>5</sup> and the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development are critical opportunities to make progress with indigenous peoples towards the achievement

of the Goals, as well as the rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, United Nations programming should be informed by the recommendations and reports of dedicated United Nations indigenous peoples' mechanisms, United Nations treaty bodies, the Universal Periodic Review and Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council and the ILO supervisory bodies.

13. Following the meeting of the United Nations Executive Committee of 13 August 2020, the Secretary-General made a series of decisions related to indigenous peoples that included enhanced support for resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in their engagement with indigenous peoples; the development of an awareness-raising campaign regarding the rights of indigenous peoples; and ensuring that indigenous peoples would be included in decision-making that affected them, including with regard to COVID-19 response and recovery. The decisions included the intent to strengthen the collective United Nations system-wide policy response to support indigenous peoples through the High-level Committee on Programmes and the CEB effort to issue the call to action on building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future with indigenous peoples (decision 2020/57, 1 (d) of the Executive Committee).

<sup>5</sup> "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights", remarks to the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 24 February 2020. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/highest-aspiration-call-action-human-rights-2020>.

## FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

14. Today, as CEB members, we affirm our commitment to supporting Member States in the promotion, protection and realization of the rights of indigenous peoples. To this end, building on the call to action for human rights and within the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, we will redouble our efforts towards realizing the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples as a means of ensuring collaborative and coherent United Nations system action to support the rights and well-being of indigenous peoples.
15. With a view to supporting and strengthening our collective efforts while recognizing the respective mandates of CEB member organizations, we, the members of CEB:
  - (a.) Request the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, with the participation of indigenous peoples, to collect and analyse lessons learned and good practices on United Nations actions in support of the realization of the rights of indigenous peoples, and make recommendations for Committee's consideration of:
    - (i.) How to step up efforts to work collaboratively to strengthen coherence, consistency and the impact of the United Nations system work in support of these rights as envisaged in the system-wide action plan on the rights of indigenous peoples;
    - (ii.) Measurable indicators for each of the six actions of the action plan to ensure effective reporting and accountability;
    - (iii.) Options for how the United Nations system can strengthen international cooperation to increase technical and financial assistance to support the realization of indigenous peoples' rights and develop or strengthen existing culturally appropriate programmes to support indigenous peoples' socioeconomic development in accordance with their own rights and priorities;
    - (iv.) Options for how the United Nations system can support the protection of indigenous human rights defenders, which include indigenous environmental human rights defenders, including through efforts to improve access to information, strengthen preventive actions, ensure remedies for violations and enhance the United Nations system's support for national efforts to address conflicts involving indigenous peoples by leveraging specialized prevention and mediation mechanisms;
  - (b.) Request the Committee to bring the lessons learned and good practices and proposals to strengthen the implementation of the action plan to the attention of CEB, and relay to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group and other inter-agency mechanisms, as appropriate;
  - (c.) Recommit our organizations to providing support, as relevant, to resident coordinators and United Nations country

teams, including through the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, to intensify efforts to implement the action plan, with particular efforts to ensure the more systematic participation of indigenous peoples in United Nations country processes, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and to support Member States in establishing institutions and mechanisms for the consultation of indigenous peoples, as well as ensuring the effective participation of indigenous youth and indigenous women, including in the follow-up to and review of COVID-19 socioeconomic response and recovery plans and the Sustainable Development Goals, and looking to the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to support these efforts;

- (d.) Recognizing the need for the United Nations system to invest in supporting countries to improve the disaggregation of data on indigenous peoples, including

on COVID-19 response, call upon the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System to consider indigenous identity and ethnicity in its efforts to improve data and statistics to support United Nations principles and programmes in the context of the System-wide Road Map for Innovating United Nations Data and Statistics and the principle of leaving no one behind (2.2.4);

- (e.) Commit our organizations to ensuring the more systematic participation of indigenous peoples in United Nations processes, United Nations decades and technical committees, as well as major United Nations international meetings, conferences and summits, including the United Nations Food Systems Summit of 2021,<sup>6</sup> the United Nations Oceans Conference,<sup>7</sup> the climate change process<sup>8</sup> and the special session of the General Assembly on COVID-19, bearing in mind the practices of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

<sup>6</sup> 2021 Food Systems Summit. See [www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit](https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Oceans Conference, to be held in Lisbon, date forthcoming. See [www.un.org/en/conferences/ocean2020](https://www.un.org/en/conferences/ocean2020).

<sup>8</sup> The twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be held in Glasgow, Scotland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, from 1–12 November 2021.